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ABSTRACT

A survey of win-loss records and length of coaching tenure for thirty Chicago public high schools reveals no relationship between tenure length and team effectiveness. The overall winning percentage of a team does not seem to be the determining criterion of coaching effectiveness at the high school level, and personnel changes are probably the result of factors other than poor winning records. Analysis of coaching change and team effectiveness support the Eitzen and Yetman analysis that a poor team will probably improve its record with or without a coaching change. (MB)

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Experience, Effectiveness and the Urban High School Subculture

Marvin Willerman

Almost everywhere in this country interscholastic athletics occupy a significant role in the life of a high school. One might speculate that identification with players on the team makes for vicarious commitment and increases the cohesive solidarity among classmates within a school. Coleman (1961) suggests that sports are probably more important than academic achievement for a large number of teenagers.

A visitor entering a foyer of an average high school would immediately see a trophy case, perhaps hear students discussing some sporting event in the halls and find students in the gym during their lunch hour shooting baskets. His cursory reading of the school yearbook and newspaper would also indicate the importance sports play in the life of the school.

The pervasiveness of athletics is said to contribute many positive benefits to students, such as health, happiness, physical skill, emotional maturity, social competence, and to instill values such as individualism, fair play, and democratic attitudes (Kay, Felker and Ray, 1972; Shifer, 1956; Schafer, 1968). However, other research seems to contradict these generally accepted notions. Ogilivie and Tutko (1971) conclude that sports do not build character and athletes display no more positive qualities than nonparticipants in athletics. Feldman (1969) states that spectator groups and athletic participants display less desirable sportsmanship values than the high school nonspectator student. In spite of the substantive research supporting or refuting the significance of interscholastic athletics, the carry-over into the community is highly visible, evidence for which is the support seen by the number of people attending local games. The police who patrol traffic on "game days" are keenly aware of this factor.

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Sports provide the fandom excitement, conversation, and a channel for their interest and loyalty, and also harnesses the athletes' energies and impulses into socially acceptable activities; thus, perhaps, enabling schools to have greater student social control. Teachers handling difficult student problems many times use the attraction of athletics for controlling deviant behavior (Waller, 1932; Schafer, 1968). On the other hand, Edwards (1969) believes that recreation and athletics do not weaken prejudice and bring all men of diverse races closer together. In fact, Green (1964) states that recreational centers set up in high-crime areas have become convenient meeting places for criminals and delinquents. In a recent review of the literature concerning the beneficial or harmful effects of athletics in school, Knicker (1974) concludes there is no conclusive evidence for either side.

Knicker also reports that the literature in conference reports and physical education journals suggests that athletic coaches and physical educators are two distinct groups with varying philosophies and goals. The person mainly responsible for the positive benefits that supposedly result from participation in high school athletics is the teacher-coach.

Coaches are thought to belong to an occupational subculture (Massengale, 1974). High school coaches are almost always recruited from athletes who are socialized by the American athletic system and are further indoctrinated into the role by the public pressure for winning. Inbreeding in the training process engenders conformity to the expected values of the subculture. Classroom teachers exist in a relatively secure environment of their own domain, isolated, and they rarely have to put their class and the results of their teaching ability on display weekly in front of thousands of spectators. The classroom teacher's competence is almost always judged professionally rather than by the numbers on a scoreboard. Polarization between coaching and academic communities created by

the in-group/out-group relationship maintains and solidifies the coaching subculture (Blumer, 1965). The necessity in many cases for support by other members of the subculture for promotion, increases adherence to the subculture's norms.

The teacher-coach usually perceives his main responsibility as coaching and winning (Edwards, 1973). They realize that at the end of a losing season they may be fired or demoted, even if it is not their fault. Organizations which want to remove a losing coach who has been granted tenure may assign the "loser" to an assistant coaching job, relieve him of all coaching duties, or transfer the person to other jobs inside or outside the athletic department. An organization operating in this manner supports the assumption that a coach greatly contributes to the success of an athletic team. Thus, the rather rigorous motivational and evaluational system may produce "self-aggrandizement' or survival behavior. Perhaps Lombardi may have reflected much of the coaching subculture ethos when he wrote "Winning isn't everything, but is the only thing worth striving for."

The coaching subculture has rather specific criteria for determining coaching effectiveness-percentage of games won. Thus, the result of an operating Social Darwinism, selecting for survival-winning coaches and casting losing coaches out of the arena, should be reflected in a relationship between the coach's length of tenure and his effectiveness. However, the selection process may not be as stringent as is commonly expected. School administrators state they first hire the teacher and then hire the coach. Administrators consider the daily teaching schedule as the prime responsibility of the teacher-coach. Sabock (1973) lists several general coaching personality types and states that some coaches are hangers-on. The hangers-on are long-time coaches who continue to coach because the title enhances their ego and they want to avoid the withdrawal pains after resigning from coaching. However, much conventional wisdom in the arena of coaching effectiveness expects that a more experienced coach

will be more effective than a less experienced coach. Indeed, this same wisdom dictates that most managerial change results in improved organizational performance, since most of these changes are made because the previous coach was ineffective. Research at professional and college level sports seems to be in conflict with these common sense notions (Eitzen and Yetman, 1972; Grusky, 1964)

Grusky found that rates of managerial succession in major league baseball teams and the degree of organizational effectiveness (percent of games won) are negatively related. He rejected the common sense notion that managers are fired because they are doing poorly and argued that managerial change contributes to declining morale and expectations of failure, which, in turn, lead to a deterioration of team performance. The Eitzen and Yetman study of college basketball team performance supports Grusky's conclusion that managerial change and team performance are negatively related. However, they indicate that the longer a coach's tenure, up to thirteen years, the greater likelihood of success. After thirteen years, the coach's effectiveness begins to decline.

Purpose

The major purpose of this investigation is to determine if school personnel policies in a large urban school district reinforce the coaching subculture's Social Darwinism. If administrators consider coaching rather than teaching as the primary responsibility of the teacher-coach then one can expect a positive relationship between the length of tenure and effectiveness as measured by percent of games won. Coaching changes would not be made randomly (as often after a coach has a winning or losing season), but would be made more frequently after a coach had a losing season.

Population

A letter was sent to all Chicago Public High Schools requesting the names of coaches and years of tenure from 1923 to 1972. Responses were received from 30 schools (55%). The won-lost records for the 78 coaches were then obtained

from the Department of Physical Education, Chicago Public Schools. Records for five of the years were not available.

Coaching Tenure and Effectiveness

To determine the relationship between coaching tenure and team effectiveness, two statistics were obtained: the length of each coach's tenure and his team's over-all winning percentage. The tenure range of this sample was from 1 to 30 years. Table I shows the means and standard deviations for these two variables.

TABLE 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Length of Coaching Tenure and Team Effectiveness

	Means	S.D.	
Length of Coaching Tenure	7.46	7.23	
Team Effectiveness in Percent	48.3*	22.75	
			r=.12

p>.05 *Not 50% because of tie games

The correlation coefficients (Pearson r) for these two variables is .12. This is not significant at the .05 level and the hypothesis (conventional wisdom) that length of coaching experience is related to (his) effectiveness is rejected.

In the Chicago Public Schools, physical education teachers are selected primarily for their qualifications and estimates of their teaching effectiveness. Their coaching specialities and abilities are considered of secondary importance. In addition, the teachers are assigned to schools which may not have need of their specialized coaching abilities; the newly assigned teacher may coach a sport for which he has secondary expertise. However, it was expected that if a coach had two or three losing seasons he would derive less satisfaction from his job. It seemed reasonable to assume that he would then resign from his coaching position and/or ask for a transfer to another sport. This would tend to wash out the negative effects of coaches assigned to sports for which they have secondary expertise and improve the strength of the relationship between length of coaching

tenure and effectiveness. However, this self-selection process did not seem to have been at work. Thus, in this school system it is likely that the physical educational philosophy dominates the coaching subculture's Social Darwinism; coaches who are "losers" are not removed from their jobs. It appears that a school system can counteract some of the harmful competitive aspects in the coaching subculture by giving primary consideration to teaching rather than coaching.

Some of the coaches may have had previous experience before their assignment in the Chicago Public Schools. This might have confounded some of the data. However, discussions with knowledgeable coaches seem to indicate that if there were coaches with previous experience they are few in number.

Perhaps in suburban and rural schools where many observers believe that sports play a more significant role in the community and coaches are considered to be more susceptible to school-community pressure to produce winning teams, there is a relationship between length of coaching tenure and team effectiveness.

Coaching Turnover and Team Effectiveness

To determine the effects of coaching turnover and team effectiveness, a comparison was made between each coach's first year record with the team record of the preceding year. The record of the new coach was judged to have improved his predecessor's performance if his winning percentage was more than one point, to have worsened if less than one point, or to have remained the same if he tied the previous coach's record. The data in Table 2 shows this comparison.

TABLE 2. Comparisons with Team Record of Preceding Year

Better		Same		Worse	
%	N	%	N	%	N
30.9	17	34.5	19	34.5	19

The data would seem to indicate that coaching change tends to have little effect on team performance.

A closer examination of the problem requires that the relative success of the previous team be considered in order to improve the validity of the generalization. The data were trichotomized into teams that had a losing season (44% or less); a winning season (56% or more); and were similar (45%-55%).

Table 3 shows the comparisons of the coaches' record controlling for the effects of team effectiveness in the previous years. For calculating a Chi-square, the data in the similar category were compressed into the winning category.

TABLE 3. Comparisons of Coaches Record Controlling for the Effects of the Teams Effectiveness in the Previous Year.

Wins 44% or lower						Similar (45%-55%)						Wins 56% or more					
Better		Same		Worse		Better		Same		Worse		Better		Same		Worse	
%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
36.8	7	36.8	7	26.3	5	50	3			50	3	22	4	17	3	61	11

$x^2=7.75$; df=2; $p<.05$

For df=2, a $x^2=7.75$ is significant at the .05 level. Thus, the common sense notion that poor performance necessitates change and that change will have a positive effect is supported. However, a closer look at the data shows that if a team had a successful season it is less likely to improve the following year and performance may deteriorate, while a poor team would tend to improve. Eitzen and Yetman state improvement of poor teams would have occurred (regression toward the mean by a combination of chance and effort) without a coaching change. It becomes more difficult for highly successful teams to improve; extremely poor teams find it easier to improve or remain poor.

Table 3 also shows that 18 coaches changed after a winning season (56% or better) and 19 coaches were changed after a losing season (44% or less). This data would seem to indicate that coaching turnover in urban secondary schools is not predominantly related to poor performance. A coach may leave because he has been fired, promoted into a more successful coaching job or an administrative position,

or transferred to another coaching job within or outside his school system. Follow-up studies that include the reasons for coaching turnover and succession might provide a clue for acquiring a clearer and deeper explanation of the effects of coaching succession.

Summary

In this study, no relationship was found between the length of a football coach's tenure and his effectiveness. There was no evidence for a curvilinear relationship as was found by Eitzen and Yetman. This difference between the two studies is probably the result of the greater importance attributed to coaching effectiveness as a criterion for earning tenure and salary increments at the college level than at the high school level. It also appears that the overall winning percentage of a team is not the significant and/or appropriate criterion of coaching effectiveness used by the Chicago Public Schools or by its coaches.

Coaching changes were found to be made randomly and were probably the result of many factors not related to removing coaches with a poor winning record. If an analysis of the coaching change and team effectiveness is made that omits the previous team's success record then one can conclude that a coaching change has no effect on team effectiveness. However, if the previous team was unsuccessful then a coaching change was found to increase the likelihood of initial success. Conversely, if a previous team was successful, a coaching change would have less immediate success. These conclusions support the Eitzen and Yetman analysis that a poor team will probably improve its record with or without a coaching change.

The necessity to be a "winning" coach at almost any cost in order to maintain a job is not supported by this study. The continual socialization of coaches giving primary emphasis to winning games is not necessary for coaching survival in the Chicago Public School system, nor likely in most other large city school systems. School personnel policies and other factors appear to have more control over the selection process in the teacher-coach domain than the coaching subculture.

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